

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

STANFORD MEDICAL CENTER
300 PASTEUR DRIVE, PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

May 17, 1973

DAvisport 1-1200
Ext. 3032

Mr. Luther W. Stringham
Assistant to the Assistant Secretary
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Stringham:

I must thank you for sending me copies of your addresses on new directions in mental retardation research. They are thoughtful, inspiring, sincere.

I could not help but take some wry pleasure and pain at reading your Bakersfield address, partly since it was my own part on the President's Panel to compose much of the language you quoted on pages 4-5.

But I wish I could share your optimism for the future of medical research in this country. These very recommendations are for just those policies that have been set back sharply over the past two years. The forward-looking tone of your talk is just contrary to the sense of exasperation and discouragement that now encumber my dealings with the NIH grants program as a daily matter. I am referring of course to the management improvements that have been provoked by congressional investigations--what has the executive done to help defend the creative flexibility of medical research against these misunderstandings? Answering a few more questionnaires, filing effort reports, and worksheets on budget calculations, pursuing patent applications, anticipating and justifying equipment purchases, and requesting approvals for changes of research direction: these are not just small necessities of bureaucratic integrity, they are a total misunderstanding of creative research, and the relentless pursuit of these administrative goals is already impairing the morale and efficiency of every NIH-supported researcher at a cost overwhelmingly larger than any conceivable savings from a cost-accounting standpoint. "Making sure that report gets out on time" costs immensely more than an outsider could possibly guess; the research laboratory has just never been organized quite that way. The clerical and administrative talent needed to cope with the present situation (not to mention the horrors that are bound to follow along this trend) can hardly be found, is costly in any event, and especially when it steals time and energy that could find better purposes than, say, writing letters like this one. I know that my own energy has been sapped to the point of seriously limiting my enthusiasm for contributing to mental retardation research in a number of possible directions: I just couldn't cope with the extra red tape they would involve, and still be scientifically useful. Fighting up hill is just too exhausting, so any effort I can make is going to be quite a bit smaller than it might have been.

L. STRINGHAM

LT. J.P. KENNEDY, JR., LABORATORIES FOR MOLECULAR MEDICINE, DEDICATED TO RESEARCH IN MENTAL RETARDATION

MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

HEREDITY

NEUROBIOLOGY

DEVELOPMENTAL MEDICINE


Mr. Stringham

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May 17, 1963

You shouldn't have to worry about this if my complaint were unique,
it isn't.

Yours sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL:jc